

Ferret General Care and Husbandry

Diet

Ferrets are obligate carnivores, meaning their diet must consist of meat proteins such as chicken, turkey and beef. Ferrets are unable to digest complex carbohydrates (sugar, grains, dairy etc). Look for a diet that is high in protein and fat but low in carbohydrates. There are several ferret-specific diets available. Ask your vet for more information and recommendations.



- **DO NOT FEED:** raisins, bananas, other fruits and veggies, peanut butter, dairy or any other food with sugar. These are hard for ferrets to digest.
- If you are looking for something special to give your furry friend, some options include: cooked meats such as chicken and beef, turkey baby food (no veggies), and freeze-dried 100% meat products. However, as with any treat, moderation is important. Ask your vet if you have any questions or before adding new foods to your ferret's diet.

Supplements

- Ferrets can be prone to hairballs, especially in the spring and fall when their coats are changing. "Ferrelax" brand hairball remedy is readily available. Follow label directions for dosing (too much can cause diarrhea).
- Your veterinarian may have recommendations for other supplements.

Housing

- Providing safe and adequate housing for your ferret(s) is important for his/her safety. Large, multi-leveled housing complexes are available at many pet supply stores. Try to avoid cages with wire bottoms, as these can create foot sores and result in other injuries.
- The materials in the cage should be strong and easy to clean. Ferrets like to dig and chew, so providing safe housing materials is very important.
- Ferrets enjoy burrowing under their bedding. Providing hammocks, sleeping sacks, fleece bedding and other linens will make your ferret one happy camper!
 - **AVOID** terry cloth (towels etc) as they can often get their sharp nails stuck in the material.
 - **AVOID** bedding with holes or rips because when burrowing, the ferret may get stuck or choke themselves.

Equipment

- Ferrets can be litter box trained! Natural litters such as "Yesterdays News" brand (which is made out of recycled newspaper) are best to use. **DO NOT** use clay clumping cat litter or wood shavings as they can cause respiratory problems. Also, some ferrets like to try to eat clay litter which is very dangerous.
- Bowls that attach to the cage are best, to prevent tipping over and soiling.

Enrichment

- Ferrets are intelligent and curious creatures. Providing daily exercise time outside of the cage is essential and will help keep your ferret happy and healthy.
- Ferrets love to dig and burrow. A fun and inexpensive way to provide enrichment for your ferret is to fill up a box of uncooked NON INSTANT rice and watch them have fun! You can also fill up a box with crinkled paper, they love the sound the paper makes when burrowing around in it.
- Provide safe and durable toys. Ping-pong balls, golf balls, mini tennis balls, jingle balls, and squeaky toys are good options or other toys sold specifically for ferrets. Ferrets also like paper bags and PVC pipes. Be sure to supervise to prevent any danger of getting trapped.
- Always supervise your ferret when they are out of their cage. It is crucial to remove all household cleaners and other harmful substances before letting them out for exercise as some ferrets can open cabinets! Ferrets can fit into tight spaces, so if not monitored escape is a high risk.

Grooming

- Ferret nails grow quickly and can get snagged easily, so trimming them frequently is really important. Weekly trimmings are recommended but it may depend on how fast your ferret's nails grow.
- Ear cleaning can be done every two to four weeks as needed. Some ferrets produce more wax than others so the length of time between ear cleaning will vary. Discuss with your vet how often you should do this. Use only ferret-appropriate ear cleaner. Ask your veterinarian for advice on ear cleaning.
- You can brush your ferret's teeth, but DO NOT use human toothpaste! Use pet-friendly toothpaste, which will also make it easier because they like the taste.
- Do not bathe your ferret too frequently. This can cause their musky odor to increase and can dry out their skin. One to four times a year is recommended. Shampoo formulated specifically for ferrets is recommended. You can also use baby shampoo.

Introducing Ferrets

- Ferrets are social creatures and do well in pairs or groups.
- Until all ferrets have been introduced and are getting along, separate housing is HIGHLY recommended.
- Initial introductions should be made slowly and for short periods of time.
- Swapping bedding in between cages will help them get used to each other's smell.

Vaccines

- Ask your veterinarian for more information as it varies for each ferret and their health needs. Rabies and distemper vaccines are generally recommended.

References:

<http://ferretcare.org>

www.healthypet.com